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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this booklet is to give beginning or first-year teachers in rural Alaskan one- or two-teacher schools some practical, effective, and useful suggestions and guidance in their teaching and living situations. Those individuals who are currently training and studying to be teachers in rural Alaska might also benefit from the information. The experiences of one teacher in a variety of rural Alaskan school settings are related, and advice about teaching and living in an isolated rural community is given. Chapters in the booklet include: (1) "What Makes an Effective Teacher in Rural Alaska?"; (2) "How to Get Along in the Community and Build Community Relationships"; (3) "But How Do I Teach All Those Grade Levels and Subjects?"; (4) "Other Items of Concern and Importance"; (5) "Possible Questions to Ask Prospective Employing School Districts in Rural Alaska"; and (6) "Advantages/Disadvantages to Teaching in a One-Teacher School." Topics covered range from psyching up for the challenge, dealing with community-specific customs and ideas, managing time, materials and students, to selecting the proper clothing and how to order groceries and supplies from the nearest urban centers. (ALL)

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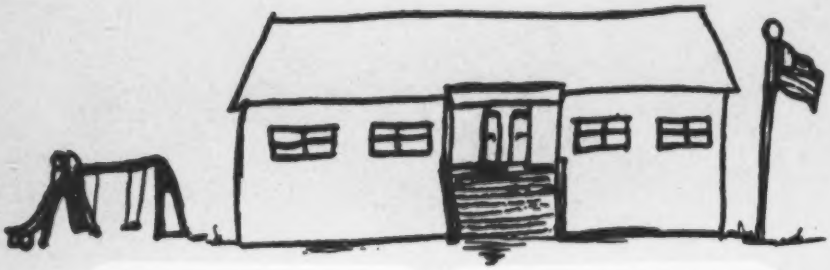

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MORE LIKE A SCHOOL FAMILY, THAN JUST

A TEACHER AND HIS/HER STUDENTS

IS A ONE TEACHER SCHOOL FOR YOU...?

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PREFACE

The pages you are about to read contain, for the most part, one teacher's opinions as how to successfully and effectively teach in a small one teacher school, or other multi-graded setting, in rural Alaska.

These opinions are based upon ten years of teaching experience in rural Alaska, and also based upon experiences other teachers have had in a similar setting.

I have attempted to be as objective, honest, and sincere as possible, in order to benefit those teachers who may, in the near future, decide to teach in the rural areas of the state.

If, in describing or commenting on any particular group of people, (i.e. students, teachers, administrators, school board members, community residents, etc.) one feels I have done a disservice to, or presented an unfair profile of any one or more groups, it was not done intentionally or consciously.

Overall, I have the utmost respect for the Lake and Peninsula School District, and all the employees, and other people it encompasses, especially, its village residents, along with the children and young adults we are attempting to educate. This booklet was written ultimately for the benefit of the children and students in the rural areas of the state.

PURPOSE OF BOOKLET

The main purpose behind the writing of this booklet is to give Rural Alaskan teachers in a one or two teacher school, K-8, or K-12 setting, (whether they be first year teachers, or first time teachers in a rural school) some practical, effective, and hopefully, some useful suggestions and guidance in their teaching and living situation.

I would also like to see this booklet placed in the hands of those individuals who are currently training and studying to be teachers in rural Alaska.

I hope to cover topics about living and teaching in rural Alaska that might not have been adequately addressed in individuals' teacher training programs, for whatever reasons.

If nothing else, what I would like the reader to come away with after reading this booklet is a strong sense of "self confidence" in his/her ability to be an effective teacher in a small multi-graded rural school. Only through having this...

> " I can do it... I can succeed... My students can learn from me... I can be an effective teacher..."

attitude, will you truly be effective, and walk away when the school year is completed, or when you leave that particular village school for good, with your head held high and with some degree of self satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

I received my Bachelors of Science in Special Education from a small state college in Massachusetts; Bridgewater State College (BSC in any future reference to this college) in 1977. BSC is not exactly a nationally recognized institution of higher learning by anyone's standards.

But, I feel it is important to mention BSC because it's while attending there that I began to develop this "self confidence" concept. The professors I had exuded a level of self-confidence in their courses taught. They attempted to inspire in us, their students, this same degree of self-confidence. Several of my professors repeatedly told us; when we graduated, we would be qualified and capable of stepping into any classroom or resource room, anywhere, and effectively work with, and teach, any special needs or regular child. Now, I may not have graduated with <u>all</u> of the necessary qualifications and experiences to jump right in and begin teaching in a small rural one teacher school in Alaska; however, I did graduate with a degree of self-confidence that I <u>could</u> teach and be effective.

I came to teach in Alaska in the fall of 1977, and have spent my entire ten years with Lake and Peninsula School District (in the Bristol Bay area). During my first three years, I was an itinerant special education teacher working in, and serving, the eight village schools in the southern half of our district. The next five years I spent teaching in Pilot Point, a small one teacher school, grades K-8, in the southern half of our district. These past two years, I have been

teaching in Egegik, another small one teacher school, grades K-8, about thirty miles north of Pilot Point.

I have put together this booklet based upon the first three years of working with and observing other teachers working in multi-grade classrooms and schools, and upon the past seven years of teaching in one teacher schools. It is my hope that the booklet will be of benefit to you and that you will use it in whatever degree will be helpful.

Please understand that what you read on the following pages are strictly my own opinions and thoughts in teaching in this type of setting. There has been no scientific study, or research attempted on my part, to validate this booklet.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE TEACHER IN RURAL ALASKA?

Is It:

1. Self-confidence...?
2. Commitment...?
3. Preparation/Organization...?
4. Cultural Sensitivity/Student Sensitivity...?
5. Flexibility...?
6. Personality/Attitude...?
7. District Central Office/Other Support Personnel...?
8. Educational Background...?
9. A Varied Personal Background...?
10. A Male or Female...?

I will address each of these qualities and then rank them on a scale of 1 to 10. (1 being the highest quality I feel is needed, and 10 being the least significant quality needed to be effective.)

1. Self Confidence:

I think you can already guess where I will rank this quality. I feel strongly this is the single most important quality a rural teacher needs, especially if you teach in a one teacher school.

Please don't misinterpret self-confidence for cockiness -- there is a big difference. When I refer to self-confidence in a teacher, I mean:

> That teacher feels he/she can step into the classroom with 10-15 students, grades K-8, and do the job he/she was hired to do by the District, and is expected to do by the parents of those children.

How you go about doing it may vary from teacher to teacher, but, having that feeling of trust and confidence in yourself and your abilities as a teacher is the most important quality you should possess.

Make decisions based on what you feel is in the overall best interest of the student(s) or the school. Be willing to accept the consequences, either positive or negative, of those decisions.

This does not necessarily mean you will automatically achieve success, progress, and personal satisfaction with each and every student for whom you have responsibility. You will discover some students are a joy and breeze to work with, others will progress along as expected. A few will challenge you and some will fully test your confidence and ability level.

You will no doubt, as I have, make your share of bleeps and blunders as you teach in this unique setting. But, if you have that high degree of self-confidence in yourself as a teacher, you <u>will</u> make progress, albeit in varying degrees, with your students. Just keep believing in yourself.

2. <u>Commitment</u>:

I remember one of my professors at BSC telling us..."If you're going into teaching for the money, or you feel its an easy job, get out of it now...do something else for a living..." I think you would agree he was correct.

> You can't be an effective teacher in a small rural school, or in any school,

unless you are committed to what you are there for.

That doesn't mean you can't have other interests and/or commitments - family, hobbies, sports, recreational activities, or even a part-time business. I do feel, however, you have to keep a proper perspective on why you are out there. Why have you chosen (if you are a non-native) to leave your home, family, friends, and your accustomed pattern of life?

You have left this all behind because you have made the decision to teach in rural Alaska, then that is what you should have as a main focal point while you are there. Whatever you, as the only teacher in that school, have to do to try and get through to your students, or to get the job done -- do it!

Feel free to complain to your Central Office Administrator... talk to yourself if you feel the need...bang your head against the wall when things seem to be building up against you. Do whatever you like, but just get the job done no matter how many hours it takes for you to accomplish all that is required of you -- do it!

Teaching in a small one or two teacher school has many positive benefits, as well as its share of drawbacks (which I will mention later on in this booklet). One thing you can count on -- if something needs to be done and if you don't do it, chances are it won't get done.

Please don't misunderstand this statement. School cooks, custodians, maintenance personnel, local school committees, administrators, parents, and the District school board members all play a role in contributing to an effective rural school. But, no one puts in as many hours at your school as you do. You are the single most important

element. See to it that duties are accomplished. Commit yourself to the school routine. It is primarily your responsibility.

3. Preparation/Organization

Another professor at BSC said to us one time..."Don't ever walk into a classroom unprepared...It will be one of the most miserable experiences you will ever have in teaching..." He was correct.

In a multi-graded school or classroom, being prepared ahead of time and having your materials organized can make the difference between a relaxed, pleasant, and effective teaching experience, and a classroom filled with tension, students off tasks for long periods of times, and confusion.

No two teachers prepare for their classrooms quite the same way. This is due, I feel, to the fact that no two teachers teach quite the same way.

I've seen some teachers write the most detailed and complete lesson plans you would ever want to see. Others, like myself, write very brief, to the point, and with key words or phrases that serve as a reminder of what that lesson entails. Still others write coded lesson plans, that only they can understand.

> In my opinion, each of these types of lesson plans would be considered appropriate if they all lead to the same results -- effective teaching on the part of the teacher, and learning on the part of the students.

One thing I do before school opens in the fall, which helps keep things moving along smoothly, is run off or make copies of as many

materials as I can that I <u>think</u> I will need during the school year. Some examples are:

a. manuscript/cursive practice sheets;

b. any worksheets that accompany each textbook;

c. any tests that accompany each textbook;

d. name sheets, days of the week/months of the year practice sheets; and

e. ANYTHING I think I might use during the school year, I run off or copy.

Then, I file these materials away to be pulled later as I have need of them. I even place the worksheets and test sheets I use in science and social studies right in the teacher's editions, chapter by chapter, so I don't have to waste time pulling them from the filing cabinet.

Granted, all this copying of materials does require many hours and days of work. But, it is worth it to me and allows me more time as the year progresses to concentrate on the more important aspects of teaching.

> Please keep in mind that you are most likely going to do all of this copying and filing of materials yourself as you will not have the luxury of a secretary in your small school. So, the more minor details and aspects of your teaching duties you can do before school opens, the less divided and crammed will be your workday.

4. <u>Cultural Sensitivity/Student Sensitivity</u>

How many times have we heard fellow teachers say something like:

> "I really don't care if my students like me or not, as long as they respect me and do their work..."

I used to agree with that statement, but not any more.

One of the benefits of being an itinerant teacher during my first three years with Lake and Peninsula School District was, I was able to work with, talk with, and observe many teachers in multi-graded classrooms and/or I also received a first-hand look at teaching materials that seemed to work with students in different grade levels and schools. But, most importantly, I was able to observe how these teachers interacted with their students and how they dealt with their students on a day-to-day basis.

All the teachers I worked with and observed did things a bit differently, naturally, as each group of students had their own characteristics. But one thing did stand out above everything else:

> I noticed if the students liked their teacher,
> and felt their teacher liked them as well...
> the atmosphere of the school and/or classroom
> was much more conducive to learning and growing.

This may seem like an obvious, or even trite statement, but keep in mind you are the only teacher those students are going to have -- not only all day long, but all year long, and who knows how many years. So, from the teacher's and the student's points of view, this becomes a very big factor in determining whether:

(a) School becomes a positive and enjoyable experience for learning to take place on the part of the student; and

(b) teaching becomes a positive and enjoyable profession.

I believe you can't "make" a student like you any more than we, as teachers, can "make" ourselves like any particular student. But, I believe there are some things you might want to consider, when you teach in a small school when YOU are the only teacher those students will have all year, that might help you all get along in a more positive manner.

A. Our Teacher the Preacher

Generally, I've found students in these rural areas do not like preaching. By preaching, I mean rambling on and on about a topic when a briefer explanation would have sufficed. Say what you have to say, but don't use verbal overkill. If you absolutely have to speak for an extended period of time on a particular subject, you might want to pause frequently...to give your students time to react to your comments, in the form of discussion, rather than a lecture.

B. Hesitations

We, as teachers, often expect to receive a quick response to our questions and queries. When we don't, we sometimes feel a bit frustrated in our students for not learning the information well enough, and in ourselves for not teaching the material thoroughly. I think you will find if you can just bite your tongue a bit, and hold back just a little longer before supplying the answer, you may find you will receive more responses. Just give your students "time" to formulate a thought in their minds and they will most likely give you a response of some kind. Rural native students are not necessarily any more or less shy than urban or non-native students. Be patient.

C. Yelling

Rural Native Alaskan students generally do not receive loud verbal scoldings from adults. Over the years, I have lost my temper several times and verbally

exploded, lighting into an individual student or group of students. I have learned this does more harm than good, especially to the older student(s). Their feelings of self-worth and "honor" are devastated momentarily (and perhaps longer). Regarding an older student, you may lose that student's trust and respect for good. It is a public humiliation they just are not accustomed to receiving. (But, then again -- who is?)

Not only does the student feel badly after a verbal thrashing, but I feel badly as well. After thinking about it, I usually conclude I could have dealt with the situation in another manner -- perhaps by taking away the student's recess time, moving the student away from the rest of the class, or sending the student back to their seat and having him/her cool off and settle down.

If you feel you have unjustly yelled at a student, by all means apologize to that student. It may not repair all the damage done, but at least the student will know you made a mistake and were willing to admit it.

So, try to avoid losing your temper, and do not yell and scream at your students no matter how angry you may feel.

D. <u>Directions</u>

Very simply, keep your directives simple, consistent, and to the point.

1) "Do something quietly at your desk..."

(Means the student has completed his assignment and there isn't enough time left in the period to begin another assignment, so the student can have free time. But, the student must not disturb the rest of the students who may be still working, otherwise, he will receive another assignment.)

2) "Let's have a seat now gang..."

(Means, put everything away, get a drink of water or go to the bathroom now, because it is time to start school.)

3) "Let's get ready for lunch..."

(Means pick up and put everything away and have a seat at your desk. I will then call the students one at a time to be dismissed.)

4) "Nathan...your assignment is on the board..."

(Means time for that student to get out his books as recess is now over.)

5) "Megan's group...come up with your reading books please..."

(Means it is that group's turn to come up with their reading books, but they don't have to bring up their workbook, only their textbook, because they always attempt their workbook pages at their desks independently. The next day, we do those pages together that were too difficult for them to do independently.)

6) "Let's pick up your mess now..."

(Means, recess is about over, or it is time to get ready for lunch, or, it is time to get ready to go home.)

7) "Jason, get out your math book and work in it during recess..."

(Means, I caught Jason off task for a longer period of time then necessary during math and now he has to make up for that time during recess.)

Overall, I try to minimize my directives as much as possible and eliminate others altogether. As an example of what I mean by the latter, one thing I didn't want to keep doing each morning was to give a verbal directive to have the students stand for the pledge to the flag, so I came up with an old stimulus--response routine.

In Pilot Point School, after reviewing calendar skills with the younger students, I would walk to the back of the classroom. The students quickly caught on, when I started to walk in this direction, it was time to stand up and say the Pledge of Allegiance. I also use the same routine with my students here in Egegik. I therefore have eliminated one less verbal directive.

E. Humor in the Classroom

> "I'm not here to be their friend and joke with them. They've enough friends. I'm here to teach them how to read, write, spell, and do math..."

After working with and observing this teacher during my three years as an itinerant teacher, and after going over this teacher's test results on his students, ("his"

can refer to either gender), I felt he did a very good job of teaching the basic skills to his students.

But, the tension and regimentation in his classroom was quite evident. I do believe he was indeed committed to his profession, as I saw him check over each and every problem, alphabet letter, word sentence, and worksheet his students passed in, every day. He kept those students on task 99% of the time. He also knew the strengths and weaknesses of each of his students. If he couldn't find ready-made extra practice sheets to attack those weak areas, he would make them up himself. He would drill those students over and over again until they mastered a particular skill to his satisfaction.

The students couldn't get out of their seats without his permission -- not to sharpen a pencil, get a piece of paper, blow their nose, ask for help, and heaven forbid, if one of those students had to go to the bathroom other than at recess time.

Even P.E., a time when you should allow your students (especially your more active and physical students) to let loose and burn off some of that pent up energy, was a drill. "First group...ready...and skip two...three... four...five...six...seven...eight." "Second group... ready...and skip two...three...four...five...six...seven ...eight."

In my three years of observing this teacher, I never once saw him smile at a student...laugh with a student...

talk with a student about anything of a personal nature, such as hobbies, toys, games, or their family. I like to think he did, when I wasn't around, but I never witnessed it. To this teacher, it was strictly business...no funny stuff.

Granted, there were a couple of students who were a handful, but the majority of them seemed like the nicest students you'd want to have in your school. It was obvious the students didn't much care for their teacher. School wasn't a fun or pleasant place to be.

If he could only have eased up on them some and allowed himself to laugh, smile, joke, and just talk with these students on a more personal scale, it would have made for a much more pleasant experience for all involved.

But, in this teacher's defense, those students did learn to read, write, spell, and do math. He was one of the hardest working teachers I had observed. He was in the classroom at 7:30 a.m. and didn't leave it until 5:00 p.m., and then, he usually took papers to his apartment to correct later in the evening.

If a parent only wanted their child to learn to read, write, spell, and do math...this would be the ideal teacher. However, if a parent wanted their child to learn all those skills plus be allowed to:

1) make a mess on the floor with paper, crayons, and scissors;

2) hum a song softly to himself while working at his desk;

3) blurt out a bit of information he/she had just read in a book or magazine to the whole class;

4) do a series of cartwheels from one end of the classroom to the other during recess,

then, you might want to think twice about sending your child to this teacher.

It was just this teacher's personality and make-up. He didn't know any other way to be. I still feel this teacher truly cared for his students and wanted to give each the best education possible. He just wasn't meant to be a teacher in a small one teacher school.

> Humor was certainly not part of his repertoire in teaching. You don't have to be a stand-up comic, but it wouldn't hurt if you could learn to laugh and joke occasionally with your students, as long as it is not at the expense of someone else's dignity or self-worth in the classroom, and the students don't take advantage of it as a means of avoiding their assignments.

Just to give you one example of what I mean. It was during reading time, I had the kindergarten group up with me at the work table, the rest of the students were at their desks, and one student came up to me to receive help while one of the kindergarten students and I were briefly discussing a comedy that was on TV the night before. This conversation triggered a response from the student who came up to get help. She commented she too knew this particular song that was sung on the show. She and I then proceeded to sing a duet of this song. Naturally, this

had disrupted the entire class, but it was worth it for two reasons -- it was important to that student to sing it, right then and there, and also, we received a nice round of applause for our efforts!!! I then proceeded to help the student with the page she was having difficulty with and the rest of the class went back to their assignments.

F. Teacher As A Friend

In my opinion, about the only way not to become friends with your students in a small one teacher school, is to make a conscious effort not to get close to them. Otherwise, its almost automatic, you will become close to your students.

> Even though you may not consider any of your students true friends, you may have some students who may consider you their friend. You may go hunting, trapping, skiing, snow-going, or three-wheeling together. With others, you may share a similar hobby. Of course, you will become closer to some students than to others. But you will come to know all your students in great detail, and they you, over time. You will find yourself doing for these students like you've never done for a group before, as you become more like a "school family" rather than just a teacher and his/her students.

You naturally see more of your students outside of the formal school setting, in a small village, than you would in an urban town or city. You will frequent their homes, and they yours.

However, in these small rural villages, everyone is on a first name basis. Young children also refer to adults on a first name basis.

How you wish to be called in your school or classroom is up to you. But, you'd better make the students aware of it the first day of school, as they will naturally want to call you by your first name. Generally, this shouldn't cause you any major problems. The students and parents will most likely respect your wishes if you prefer to be addressed as Miss, Ms., Mrs., or Mr. I was on a first name basis with my students in Pilot Point School mainly because that's how the students knew me when I was an itinerant teacher. Here in Egegik, I told the students the first day of school I wanted to be called Mr. Blackwood, or Mr. B., and not by my first name, even though they all knew what it was. Most of the students didn't have any problems respecting my wish. However, one older student, who was very close to the teacher I had replaced and was on a first name basis with, didn't like this request. Although this student complied with my wish, he/she felt somewhat offended by this.

G. Interacting Socially with Your Students

By this, I simply mean taking the time to play with your students during recesses and lunch breaks. You don't have to necessarily go outside with them every day or at every recess period. There also may be some students who do not wish to have your company during these breaks, as they might consider it their time to socialize among themselves.

This kind of interacting with your students is even more important when, in my current situation, I have only two older male students. When the weather is nice we usually go out to the playdeck and play basketball. For

one of these students in particular, this is obviously appreciated very much. His ball skills have improved dramatically since we first began about a year ago.

As for the younger students, they may be perfectly content to play by themselves, but they certainly appreciate an extra push from behind when they're on the swings, or an extra fast spin on the merry-go-round equipment.

When the weather is too cold or nasty to go outside during recesses, we often break out the jump ropes or use the nerf balls to get some kind of organized activity going. Other times, it is every student for themselves, and nothing special goes on.

Many times, students will come to me after school and/or on the weekend to request a pick up game of some sort with some other students or adults in the community. They certainly appreciate you taking the time to participate with them.

> The point is, what you might think of as nothing special, or no big deal, perhaps to your students, or at least some of your students, the fact you are taking time to join them at recess times or after school, could make a big difference in how they perceive you.

H. Freedom of Movement Within the Classroom and Among the School

This is probably tied very closely to how each individual teacher teaches and views their style of classroom management. I personally find it difficult to impose restrictions upon students getting out of their seats to sharpen a pencil, get a piece of paper, get a

dictionary, go to the bathroom, ask another student for help, get a library book in the next room, or even stand by their desk to do their work instead of sitting in their seat.

I suppose in a class of 25-30 students, I could see where some orderliness would be called for. But in a class of 10-15 students, I generally don't have any specific set of rules for such movement.

However, there will always be a few students who, realizing I don't have any set rules pertaining to such movement, will inevitably take advantage of this. I still feel I should not restrict the whole class because of the actions of a few students. But rather, deal with those students who appear to be taking their freedom of movement a bit too far. This can be done in a few ways. I can make a general announcement before I begin each day, that I am concerned about this matter; speak to those students individually about it; or simply have the student(s) make up the time they wasted at recess time.

> In this area, I try to put myself in the students' position. I believe it is asking a lot to expect students to raise their hand each and every time they want to get out of their seat for something. I don't have time to monitor such activity. In a small school or class setting such as you have out here, I again feel that the students will not generally abuse such a privilege. But, you as their teacher, will probably determine the degree of such movement about the classroom or throughout the building based upon your level of tolerance. It becomes a matter of how much you can put up with.

I. Flexibility

There is a common saying, or belief that is shared by some individuals in these small villages in the Bristol Bay Area, and perhaps by other villagers in the state. It goes something like:

"I don't make plans...because they never work out..."

Now that's what I call being flexible. Actually, I believe the phrase has more to do with the unpredictable weather conditions more than anything else. Many a well laid travel plan has been squashed by a sudden change in the weather. Of course, you realize, the only two ways in and out of these small villages are by plane or boat. There are no roads connecting these villages, for the most part.

If you are a non-native and grew up anywhere in the Lower-48 states, you probably grew up and lived by a time schedule of some sort as I did. I won't bother to list these, as you can reflect back on your own lifestyle to understand what I mean.

Rural Native Alaskans also have timetables and schedules which effect and manage their lives, but, I would say they are much broader, wide ranging, and more flexible -- probably tied more to the cycles of nature and the seasons than to the schedule of a 40-hour work week. Naturally, most of this is due to the fact that these small villages are mainly fishing communities. Very few people have year-round jobs. It is not that they

wouldn't welcome more opportunities for year-round employment, it is just the nature of the way of life in rural Alaska. The majority of the residents make their money in commercial fishing ventures in the summer months. They then have to budget their funds throughout the winter. Their abundant leisure time can be spent in a variety of ways -- hunting, trapping, snow-going, three wheeling, arts and craft work, card games, church and social get-togethers, maintenance of homes and equipment, etc.

> What I'm saying is -- it is a way of life that we, as non-natives, are not accustomed to. It is a different way of life -- not a better or worse way of life -- just different from how you and I grew up.

You have to understand (as Dorothy did when she landed in Oz) you will be working and living under a somewhat different set of conditions, rules, and traditions. You should attempt to make a conscious effort to familiarize yourself with, and become sensitive to this new setting.

Things which worked well for you back home in your other school may or may not work well out here. If it does, stick with it...If it doesn't, let it go. Do not be so rigid and/or inflexible.

> Listen to what your students, parents, and other village members you meet, say. Some may not say much, but when they do speak, it is usually for a good reason. You have to attempt to see their point of view. What you think or feel is right, might very well be from your cultural point of view. But it might not be looked upon in the same manner, in the village where you work and live.

You will stick your foot in your mouth many times as you learn to understand the local ways. As long as they aren't major or serious misjudgements, the local people generally will be very tolerant if they feel you were sincere in your efforts.

6. Personality/Attitude

> First impressions are usually lasting ones, I've generally found, with the people in these small villages. So, chances are, you will know within a very short period of time, how you have been perceived by the students and adults in your community.

I cannot give you a magic recipe that will guarantee your acceptance in your particular community, as each village, I've found, does have it's own unique characteristics. But, I feel I can make some general statements about your living and teaching situations that you might want to consider.

A. Don't approach your new situation with the attitude that you know everything there is about living and teaching in rural Alaska, if you have never experienced it before. The local people will see through this right away. Don't be embarrassed or shy to ask someone for assistance or suggestions, or outright help. You will find the majority of the villagers are very sharing, kind, and generous people. Chances are, they will be more than willing to help you get settled in and into the routine of rural living.

B. Be willing to keep an open mind about situations as you get to know people and talk about various subjects. It doesn't mean you have to accept or agree with that person, or change your beliefs, but do not be too quick to ignore, or disregard their opinions either.

C. Patience is a quality you will need to try to develop more of, if you don't already have a high level. You will need it, as you try to understand why events are the way they are out here. You must not be too quick to make judgements about the rural lifestyle. You and I simple were not born and raised out here. We will inevitably compare the two lifestyles.

7. District Central Office/Other Support Personnel

As I mentioned before, you, the teacher, are the most important person in the scheme of your local school situation. You are the one who will put in the most time and effort on a day-to-day basis. You, more than any other person or group of people, will determine the degree of success your students achieve during the school year.

However, there certainly are other contributing members to the school setting, which, depending on their effectiveness and commitment, can help or hinder your efforts to provide quality education to the students. Let's start at the top of the support personnel ladder and work our way down.

A. District School Board - These people are responsible for the operation of the entire school district, of which your school may be just one of many. The members of this board are usually people who were born and raised in one of the villages, or, who have lived in the area for a considerable amount of time.

I like to believe the people who are elected to serve on this board are committed to the purpose of helping provide the best possible education to the students in the area.

One distinct advantage of working for a small rural school district is, you get to know the board members somewhat better than in a larger school district, and they get to know you. Dedicated and committed board members

will go out of their way to support and help a dedicated and committed teacher, because they will want that teacher to return year after year.

B. Administration - One very nice advantage of teaching in a one teacher school is you don't have to answer directly to anyone on a daily basis. It is basically you and the students.

An administrator will fly out to your school several times during the school year. (3-10 times, depending upon the needs and concerns of your school.) If things are going smoothly, chances are you won't see much of your administrator. An effective administrator will get you answers to questions your local school advisory committee asks, to which you may not have the answers. He/she will see to it that parts, equipments, or supplies you need are ordered and delivered as quickly as possible. An effective administrator could possibly make the difference between a temporarily struggling teacher making it successfully through the year, or resigning his/her teaching position.

C. Maintenance Personnel From Central Office - Unfortunately, these people sometimes get a bad rap, as you either love them or hate them. When things at your site are going smoothly, you could care less where the maintenance people are. But, just as soon as your furnace goes down, a water pipe freezes, or a sewer line backs up, you are on the phone demanding they drop what they are doing

and get down here immediately. In the interim, you bad mouth them, wondering why they didn't see this problem during the summer and fix it then.

Over the years, I have had pretty good luck and cooperation with the maintenance people in our district. But, you have to be patient with them and realize that they have other schools, projects, and emergencies to deal with besides yours. You must learn to handle as much of your maintenance problems as you can, locally, either yourself, or with the assistance of your school custodian, or members of the village. If it is an emergency that does require district maintenance personnel, be sure to give them as much information as you can, including the proper part numbers if it is a piece of equipment that has broken down. This will speed up the process of repairing the damage. But, be patient with these people as they try to do the best they can, given the vast possibilities of things that can go wrong in such a widespread school system.

D. <u>Itinerant District Librarian/Special Education Services/Itinerant Music/Art Teachers</u> - It truly is a luxury having a district librarian come around once a month or so to make sure your library stays organized and functional. He/she can also recommend needed books/reference materials/and/or periodicals that would make an important addition to your school library. He/she can even order it all for you.

Lake and Peninsula School District used to have itinerant art and music teachers that would travel to each school for about eight weeks each, (one or two days per week). They would provide activities and experiences the regular classroom teacher might not be qualified to teach. These two programs were generally well-received by the students, and supported by the district overall. Unfortunately, due to budget cuts, these programs had to be eliminated.

As a former special education itinerant teacher, I can speak about the quality of special education services delivered to these small rural schools from first hand experience. In my opinion, as admirable as the district's efforts are to provide quality and effective special education services to those needy students, there just isn't enough of a budget to do the job properly. The rural school districts in Alaska do the best they can given the current dollar amounts. Itinerant special education teachers get stretched pretty thin trying to provide quality services to teachers and students. Some needy students could benefit from full-time special education teachers, but due to the unrealistic costs of such a requirement, the student has to settle for substantially less. But, please keep in mind this is not so much a reflection upon the rural school districts' commitment to special education services, as it is a reflection

of one of the negative consequences of living in a rural village in Alaska.

However, the Special Education staff of Lake and Peninsula School District was recently recognized by a national education organization for its quality of services delivered to the students in our district. This is due in large part, I believe, to the quality of the special education staff we currently have, headed by Ron Jones, and, also the fact that several of the special education staff members have been with the district for several years.

E. Local School Committee - In my opinion, these people are the second most important element in contributing to an effective rural school. It is vital that the teacher and the local school advisory committee work together, and get along, for the benefit of the students. It is also vital for the teacher's benefit, as I can't imagine a more unpleasant working condition for a teacher than trying to work with an unsupportive school committee. If you ever lose the support of your local school committee, the best advice I could give you would be to finish up the school year and look for another place to teach. Don't ever teach in a village school where you are really not wanted. Go someplace where you are wanted.

Each village, as I have mentioned before, has its own unique characteristics; therefore, each local village school committee will function differently. Some will be

quite active and will expect you to keep them informed of anything and everything concerning local school matters, and District-wide matters and concerns. Others may trust your judgment and pretty much let you run the whole show. In the case of the latter instance, meetings will be scheduled as needed, rather on a monthly basis. But whatever type of local school committee you have in your village school, remember they are there for your benefit in helping you to effectively run the school, so use them and work with them.

F. Parents - Parents would be the third most important group of people in helping to make for an effective rural school. It is a much more pleasant teaching environment when you have the support and backing of the parents of your students. By this I mean several things:

a) Making sure their children are in bed at a decent hour on school nights.

b) Keeping their children enrolled in school on a regular basis.

c) Making sure their children do their homework.

d) Supporting the teacher in any possible disciplinary measures against their child.

e) Attending parent/teacher conferences as felt needed.

f) Taking the time to work with their children at home on learning and other educational activities.

Just as you may not get along with every student in your school, so too, you may not have the full support of every parent in your village, for whatever reasons. You shouldn't be too concerned about this until you begin to lose the support of the majority of your parents. Then, it is most likely time to move on to another village school.

8. Educational Background

I am not convinced having a masters degree or doctoral degree, will necessarily make you a more effective teacher in a small rural school. I suppose it couldn't hurt. But, I believe a generalist would be at more of an advantage, than a specialist. That is, a teacher who has basic training in the general subject areas, whether it be a bachelors or masters degree, but who also has some skill or competence in music (perhaps can play an instrument or who has a good singing voice), art (perhaps is an amateur painter or has other artistic interests), and some training or experience in drama activities and programs. This overall general competence would be a big plus in a one teacher school, providing that teacher had the self-confidence and commitment to go along with those varied skills.

In my ten years of teaching I have met only one teacher who possessed all of these skills, and more. I am sure she wouldn't mind me using her real name - Helen Bowers. I could write a whole booklet on her alone, so I'll try to keep this brief.

Helen has a masters degree in Elementary Education, an endorsement in Reading, and also one in Special Education. She can play the piano, sing and even yodel. She can paint and draw very well. She is also an excellent dancer. Also, anyone who ever met Helen would never accuse her of lacking self-confidence or commitment. She spent five years with our district. The first two years she was an itinerant reading specialist, and the last three years taught in Ivanof Bay - a small one-teacher school in the southern half of the district and the most isolated of our fourteen village schools. I believe Helen would agree with me that overall, possessing a wide variety of educational skills, training and competencies would better serve the teacher in a small multi-graded school than an advanced degree in one particular field.

This doesn't mean you should rule out teaching in this type of setting if you don't possess a variety of skills. You will find these students enjoy experimenting with paints, crayons, and any other type of art medium. Even if you can't carry a tune (like me) the students still like to sing along to children's records and tapes.

Putting together a Christmas program is always a challenge, especially if you only have a few older students who can read the script and memorize the lines. You will often have to rewrite a lot of Christmas plays to fit the number of actors you have to work with. In some instances, you will have to resort to drastic measures and write your own Christmas plays. But, it can be done, as Helen would attest to. Again, it all

goes back to having the self-confidence and commitment to get the job done. Just keep in mind, there will be no other staff members around to help you so you have to plan ahead and give yourself plenty of lead time to prepare for those special occasions. You will also find that some of the parents and your local school committee will assist you if you ask them, as they understand their teacher may not be "good" at everything. They will support you if you are willing to put forth the effort.

9. A Varied Personal Background

I suppose having ascended a 15,000 foot mountain, kayaked the major South American Waterways, hot air ballooned across three states, parachuted from 10,000 feet, gone on a safari in deepest Africa, or backpacked along the Great Wall of China would qualify you as possessing a varied personal background. But these are not, in my opinion, prerequisites for being an effective teacher in a rural setting.

It would certainly have done wonders for your self-confidence. Commitment was definitely called for in such tasks. But the average, ultra conservative, low profile, middle of the road teacher can still do an exemplary job out here. There are many other avenues for acquiring self-confidence and commitment. You will not want to rely solely on your previous achievements to undertake the task and responsibility you will have out here in a small multi-graded school setting. You will be amazed what you can do, and how

successful you can become once you are presented with the challenge.

10. Male or Female

I have deliberately listed this quality, not because I am a male chauvinist. In my years of living and teaching in rural Alaska, I believe this state is still primarily a sexist state. By that, I mean there are still definite identifiable male and female roles that are tradition in rural Alaska. I believe this is due to the relatively demanding environment in which these people exist. All have their roles, tasks, and functions to fulfill. This is not to say that women in Alaska are looked upon as second class people. I have seen many village women perform tasks and work in jobs that are physically demanding, of high skill, and in some instances, dangerous and/or risky.

However, being a male or female does not give you any advantage in teaching in a small rural school in Alaska. Do not let your gender discourage you in any way. Again, I only have to refer you back to Helen. She was just as capable, and in many ways, more capable than many males, in undertaking the role of Principal/Teacher. No one particular sex holds a monopoly, or has a decided advantage in successfully teaching in rural Alaskan village schools.

Now, for the ranking of these qualities in order from highest priority to the least. Simply refer back to the beginning of this chapter. They are already ranked, just as I wrote and discussed them. Self-confidence and commitment being the top two most important qualities to being an effective

teacher in a small rural school setting; a varied personal background and gender of sex being the least significant qualities, in my opinion.

CHAPTER TWO

HOW TO GET ALONG IN THE COMMUNITY AND BUILD COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

This may seem rather unusual, but you really don't have to do very much to get along with the people in your local community. It is primarily what you don't do that could make the difference. Let me discuss a few topics and areas of concern that, hopefully, will clarify what I mean by this.

A. Visiting

As you would expect in a small relatively isolated village, there is a great deal of informal socializing. It is important that you try to visit and socialize once in a while, especially your first year in the village. The community members do want to get to know you on a more personal level, than just as a teacher.

Over the years, I have found that you should make the initial move and go visit the people and their homes. But, be prepared to drink several cups of coffee, tea, or juice, and snack on some freshly baked food, or even join them for lunch or supper. I can't remember when I visited someone and was not offered something to eat or drink. As I mentioned in Chapter One, you will find most of the community members very kind, gracious, and sharing individuals.

As I mentioned several times, each village is somewhat different in its make-up and character. I became aware of this when I was an itinerant teacher. There were some villages I looked forward to visiting, others I didn't necessarily enjoy, but that was just a matter of

personal interest or taste. Other itinerant teachers probably had their particular favorites.

What I am about to say may not seem very flattering, or positive, but I feel it is important to mention, because it could save you from making an honest mistake, or avoiding any personal controversy. I believe I am fairly accurate in what I am going to say as I experienced it when I was an itinerant teacher.

> If you are a single teacher, you have to be somewhat extra careful who, or when you go visiting, especially during your first few months in that village. There were some villages where I didn't go visiting many families' homes because a new single man in town was looked upon by some people as a threat or competition to their women, or it wasn't considered the proper thing to do. I found many husbands to be quite possessive of their wives, and vice-versa. I will mention one incident as an example of how possessive one man was.

When I was an itinerant teacher, I had to call the central office to let them know when I was ready to move on to the next village school, as I had no set schedule. They would send a plane down to move me to the next site. During those early years, there was only one phone for the entire village. This phone was usually located in the village community hall, and a local person was hired by the village to log all calls made on the phone and to collect the time and charges for the calls.

I was working in one of our smaller village schools. I had completed my work there and went down to the community hall to use the phone to have a plane sent down for me. This was my first visit to this village so I hadn't met any of the local people as yet. I walked into the community hall and there was a young lady taking care of the phone;

no one else was in the building except her and me. I introduced myself as a teacher with our school district and proceeded to use the phone.

After you have hung up from completing your call, you have to wait for the operator to call back with your time and charges so you can pay the phone attendant. While I was waiting for the operator to call back, the phone attendant and I talked a bit. Suddenly the door to the hall burst open and in stomped this young man, very upset and angry. He bellowed out, "What the hell is going on here?" I responded with my name and that I worked with the school district and was calling central office on school business. I extended my hand for a greeting and he responded, "Oh yeah...well I'm this girl's boyfriend and don't you forget it!!!" I responded that was nice, but I just came to use the phone. Fortunately for me, the operator called back with my time and charges, so I paid for my call and left the loving couple alone.

Unfortunately, the weather turned lousy and I wasn't able to get out that day. This meant I had to go back to the community hall the next day to make another call to the central office. I dreaded the thought, but down I went again. When I walked through the door this time, there was the phone attendant, and there he was with one of those contented, satisfied grins on his face that says..."gotcha!" I made the call without incident, but this time I didn't strike up a conversation with either person.

The plane finally made it in the next day. As the pilot was unloading freight for the village, I took one last look around before stepping into the plane. As I glanced over to the community hall, there he was standing in the open doorway looking in my direction. I'd like to think he was checking to see how much freight or mail sacks came in, or

if anyone he knew was getting off the plane, but I don't think that is what was going through his mind.

In another incident, I recall visiting one family when I was an itinerant teacher, and the husband wasn't home; only the wife and two children. I stayed about fifteen minutes. I noticed, upon leaving, that the woman had left the inside door open the entire time (most of these homes have an arctic entry way). I thought this was unusual as it was winter. I later found out that this woman always does this when a male comes to the house and her husband is not at home. This may not have been an entire village tradition, but it was this particular woman's tradition. In other villages this wasn't the case. There didn't seem to be any problem with visiting when the husband was not home.

This might also apply to a single female teacher visiting a family when the wife is not at home. There just seems to be this understanding, or proper respect, in some villages.

I once overhead two women talking. One woman was inviting the other (who was from another village and was only going to be in town for a few hours) to come to her house for coffee and a visit. The woman made the comment that "there aren't any more men over there now, they've all left." I knew both women fairly well and I wanted to ask what difference it would make if there were still men over there, as both women were married. (I didn't ask, because this is a perfect example of what I referred to in Chapter One about putting your foot in your mouth.) I've concluded that for this particular woman, who offered the invitation, it wouldn't be proper to bring her friend over to her house with several men sitting at the kitchen table. You may not find this to be the case in your particular village, but I did want to make you aware of this as it

is a good example of what I was referring to in Chapter One, under flexibility; when I mentioned you will be working and living under a different set of conditions, rules, and traditions. You may come across this attitude in some circumstances.

B. Socializing

My last couple of years in Pilot Point, I was affectionately (I hope?) referred to by some as "The Hermit on the Hill." It was because I didn't get out and around as much as in previous years. It had nothing to do with not liking any particular group of people any less than before, or because I was acting stuck-up. It is basically that I am sort of a loner. I seem to enjoy being by myself, enjoying the peace and solitude of an evening or a weekend. I prefer to do things alone. I think in many ways, it is one of the main reasons I enjoy being in a small one-teacher school. I don't have to worry about offending or alienating any staff members. I believe that nickname would apply even more so here in Egegik. One advantage I had when I came to teach here two years ago was I already knew many people from my earlier years as an itinerant teacher. So, I felt very comfortable about the community and its people. I don't do very much socializing here. I pretty much concentrate on teaching and taking care of the school routine. It has noting to do with the people here, as they are some of the kindest and most generous people I have had the pleasure of knowing. I have had dinner at several people's homes, and the local school committee and village members get together at the school for a monthly potluck and a movie. So, I do get to socialize with some community members. I know that some wish I would try to get out and around and become more visible in the community. I have no excuses for this other than what I mentioned

earlier; I just seem to prefer being alone. The local school committee and parents haven't held this against me because I have their respect as a committed teacher. (Remember what I said in Chapter One about commitment and why you are primarily here?)

So, you don't have to be a social animal to be accepted by the local community members. As long as the parents know that you are doing the job in the classroom, they will be more than willing to put up with your reclusiveness for student progress and effective teaching.

C. Differences of Opinion/Beliefs

As you make friends and acquaintances in the village, you will no doubt, sooner or later, touch upon a topic or subject area where you and that person will differ in opinion. Having differing opinions, and each arguing or presenting their reasons for them, does provide for meaningful exchange of thoughts; and chances are, each can respect the other's opinion. However, when such a conversation takes place between two individuals who are meeting for the first time, problems may arise. I want to tell you about a conversation that took place between a first year teacher in our district and a village council president.

This first year high school teacher went to talk to the council president about teaching outboard motor repair. The local man had taught this class to high school students several times in previous years and was going to teach it again. This local man is an accomplished fisherman and obviously has lifelong practical experience in maintaining an outboard motor. The two began talking about how the class should be taught. The local man felt the best way to teach the class was to show the students what to look for when an outboard motor breaks down (i.e., check the gas, oil level, spark plug, other various parts and connections -

depending on the nature of the problem.) The first year teacher felt strongly that theory should be taught to the students. He felt if the students knew exactly how an outboard motor operated and functioned, and all the proper names for the various parts and systems, that they could better identify what the nature of the problem was. (Not knowing the first thing about an outboard motor, I think both methods sound pretty good -- but then again, what do I know?)

Both stood firm in their beliefs as to the best way of teaching this class. One way was based upon classroom knowledge and course work; the other was based upon life experience and occupation.

Needless to say, the local man refused to teach the class that year. The first year teacher had made a serious mistake. He made the mistake of getting off on the wrong foot with one of the most influential men in the village. This doesn't mean the teacher should have buckled under and changed his belief in how that class should have been taught. But rather, he didn't appear to respect this local man's opinion and method on this topic. In other words, it was a slap in the face from an outsider, on how to best repair a piece of equipment that this local man had been using and repairing most of his life. (This gets back to what I mentioned in Chapter One about trying to look at things from the local cultural point of view.) I have no doubt that the two men (and the students) could have learned something from each other. But that opportunity never had a chance to materialize. The teacher had lost this man's respect before he ever had a chance to earn it. This first year teacher was simply too set in his ways and too inflexible. He never made it through the entire school year.

This type of conversation, argument, or disagreement probably could have taken place half-way through the school year when the two men would have, by that time, probably been better acquainted and no lasting ill feelings would have developed.

> The point I am trying to make here is you don't have to necessarily sacrifice or compromise your own personal beliefs in order to get along with, or be accepted by, the community. But, you might want to temper your opinions and beliefs somewhat, and not impose them the very first opportunity you have. Get to know the individuals on a more personal basis first.

D. Hunting/Trapping

Another area of concern that I want to mention briefly, as it has caused problems for some teachers in our district in the past, has to do with hunting and trapping. Obviously, rural Alaska is a haven for the adventuresome, outdoors type of person, especially in these two areas.

It is very important that you follow and observe the seasons, and bag limits in your area. But, from my observations, experiences, and from the misfortunes of some other teachers, this may not be enough. Even though you may have every legal right to hunt and trap once you have met the residency requirements, you may find that there are certain species you may not want to go after aggressively.

In some parts of our district, bear hunting by a teacher (especially a first year teacher) is frowned upon, particularly if the teacher goes out on his/her own without a local person along. Outside big game hunters do come into this area on occasion, and with the guidance of an experienced local hunter (usually for a fee), can take a bear. But, generally speaking, and for whatever reason, in some villages the shooting of bears by non-natives is not looked upon favorably. In some

villages this may not be a problem. So, be extra careful if you are an enthusiastic hunter. Check with the local people concerning their feelings and attitudes about teachers and non-natives hunting particular species of game. It could save you from making an honest mistake and drawing any unnecessary ill feelings toward you.

The same thing applies to trapping. There may be some animals that the local village members have no qualms about a teacher or non-native setting out traps for a particular animal. But, other species may be thought of as reserved for local natives only, such as lynx, wolves, or wolverines. This could be due to the small number of such animals in the area, and therefore, a higher price for any pelts taken. Also, local residents may need the extra income such trapping may take in, more than a teacher might.

Also, if you do plan to trap, be sure to check with other local trappers before you set out any, as you may inadvertently set out traps on someone's traditional grounds that they have been using long before you ever came to that village. This would certainly cause ill feelings between you and the local community members.

> In my opinion, no matter how much you might want to hunt or trap a particular species of animal in that area, and no matter how legal it might be for you to do so; if you receive a consensus of opinion from the local people that doing so would be frowned upon, then I would think twice before I proceeded to do so.

As in any community, all members do not get along with each other all the time. So, don't expect to please and get along with each and every community member. No matter how long you teach in one of these rural villages, no matter how well you may be liked, respected, or even loved, the bottom line is, you will always be an "outsider." Please don't take this as a put down or an insult or with any type of negative

connotations. It is simply a fact. You and I were not born and raised in these villages or in this culture. We will never truly understand and fully comprehend the people and students we live and work with, but that doesn't mean we can't be effective teachers of these students and develop close friendships and ties with some of the local people we meet.

E. Drugs/Alcohol

This is another area of concern that might not be very flattering, and easy to write about, but I feel it is important to mention for any teacher thinking or considering living and teaching in rural Alaska. Drugs and alcohol unfortunately have penetrated the rural areas of this state. Like any other community in the United States, there are individuals in these villages, natives and non-natives, who abuse them.

As you know, there are many reasons why individuals use drugs and alcohol. I won't bother to list them. I do believe however, some of the reasons adults in these small, relatively isolated villages abuse drugs and alcohol might be

1) Lack of year round, full-time job employment.
2) Long winter months which may lead to unusual levels of stress or depression.
3) Lack of engaging in other, more constructive activities.
4) Sheer boredom, too much time on some people's hands.
5) A poor fishing season, which doesn't provide adequate income to sustain families through the winter and may lead to unusual levels of stress and tensions.
6) Not fully aware of the risks and/or dangers of drug and alcohol abuse.

I certainly have made my share of blunders as regards alcohol and drinking with some local community members. Some, I am too embarrassed to write down in this booklet for you to read. But, I will say, if you are a non-drinker and do not take drugs, stay that way. Stick to your convictions and beliefs in this matter.

If you do drink or take drugs, then I would strongly recommend you refrain from doing so while you are in the village, or if you do so, use discretion. Drink only with those individuals you completely trust or are close friends. It is very difficult to keep secrets in these small communities. Everyone knows everyone else's business.

You will find that there isn't much of what you and I would refer to as social drinking. By that I mean, having a couple of beers or drinks in the evening or sharing a few drinks among friends or acquaintances and then saving the rest for another time. Unfortunately, the style of drinking you will find out here is more of a mass consumption. By that I mean, if an individual purchases two cases of beer, then that beer will be consumed that day, or night. There won't be much, if any, left come the next day. This is why it is difficult to drink with some of the community members. You may have a couple of bottles of vodka, whiskey, or wine that you break out for your guests. However, your company may not leave until those bottles are emptied, no matter how long it takes. This can cause problems for you. Tensions may begin to run high as you try to get your guests to leave. Arguments may break out among your guests, and perhaps, even physical attacks may occur between you and/or among your guests.

It is a style of drinking to which you may not be accustomed. Please don't think that all local community members drink this way, or

that all local community members drink, because this is simply not true. You will find there are many individuals with whom you can share a social drink or two. You will also find many individuals who do not drink at all. There are some villages that are completely dry and have taken the necessary steps to make them that way. Other villages are attempting to deal with the problem, as they are beginning to realize that substance abuse is negatively affecting the lives of their community members.

> Whether you like it or not, whatever you do in your village community on a personal or professional basis, is a reflection of, or on, the school district which that village school is a part of. This is one of the prices you pay for living and working out here. This is why I stated in Chapter One, you are the most important element in your school setting. Nobody will put in more time and effort at your school site, nor will be judged more critically as to the effectiveness, or ineffectiveness of your village school.

Another negative factor of drinking with local community members is, when you drink with some of the parents of your students. Many of these village homes are relatively small, and children do not always have their own rooms to go and spend the evenings when adults are drinking in their home. If you are drinking at one of your students' homes, and you have too much to drink, your student may see you in this condition and word of this can quickly spread throughout the community. Even if you have only one or two drinks while there, your student may still tell others that you were at their house last night drinking. The assumption by other community members may be that if you were drinking, you must have got drunk. You could lose the respect of your students and other community members.

So, based upon personal experience and experiences other teachers had had, my advice to you would be:

1) If you do not drink or take drugs, do not start.

2) If you do drink or take drugs, refrain from doing so while in your village.

3) If you are a social drinker, make sure you only drink with other social drinkers in your community.

4) Do not drink or take drugs in front of your students.

5) Do not drink or take drugs with parents of your students.

6) Do not give alcohol to community members that you are not close to, as you will be approached by others who wish to borrow from you.

CHAPTER THREE

BUT HOW DO I TEACH ALL THOSE GRADE LEVELS AND SUBJECTS?

I believe this is one of the most important questions all teachers in a small one or two teacher school ask themselves when they first arrive, and perhaps one that other teachers, considering teaching in this type of setting, might also ask. Some prospective teachers, who perhaps would make excellent teachers in rural Alaska, might hesitate making the choice to come and work in a small school, because they don't feel they could effectively teach all those different grade levels and subject areas.

Granted, teaching in a K-8, K-12, or other multi-graded setting certainly may be initially more of a challenge than if you only have one grade to be responsible for. Again, I have to say, there is no one effective way to teach in this type of school setting, as I firmly believe no two teachers teach exactly the same way. Each teacher has their own strengths and weaknesses, and you must realize you may not be completely competent or comfortable teaching every subject area and/or grade level. As I mentioned before, I have only met one teacher in my years of teaching in this district that came close to being truly qualified and competent to teach in a one teacher school -- Helen Bowers. But, I am sure if you could talk to Helen, even she would mention some areas where she felt she had some difficulties.

I will, however, give you some suggestions regarding techniques, strategies, and class management that seem to have worked quite

well for me over the years in working with a large span of grades and levels of subject areas.

A. Schedule

Try to stick to a regular, consistent daily and weekly class schedule and you will find the students will automatically switch over to the next subject area. In my daily routine, for example, my students have learned:

After the pledge to the flag, the students get out their math books. But the kindergarteners and some of the other younger students know that before they get out their math books, they have to first study the set of addition, subtraction, multiplication or division flash cards they are currently working on. They have learned they study these cards for a few minutes, then bring them up to me for a quick drill. Only then, do they get out their math books.

The students have also learned that ten o'clock is spelling time. They don't always need me to tell them to put away their math books and get out their spelling books. They also know that they work in their spelling books until I say..."Let's get ready for recess..." After morning recess is over, they know it is reading time until I say..."Let's get ready for lunch..."

After lunch, they know it is time to break out their science books, except if it is Thursday. On Thursday, they know we have P.E. after lunch. At 1:30 they have learned it is time to switch over to their English books unless it is Tuesday or Thursday. They know on these days it is time to work on their writing assignments and stories. They will work on their English assignments or on their writing assignments until I say..."Let's get ready for recess..." After recess, it is social

studies and, of course, they all know what they are going to do on Friday after lunch..."ART!!"

So, if you can keep to some kind of consistent schedule, you will find your students will monitor themselves to a great extent, and this will help you cut down on your verbal directives and help keep things moving smoothly along.

B. Varying Schedule

Now, please don't think I keep to this type of daily schedule 180 days, come rain or shine. I don't think either my students nor I could stand this much consistency. I do vary it somewhat, depending upon the time of year, holidays, the students' interests, and yes, even my interests. Let me explain what I mean by these.

(1) The Time of the Year

I find it beneficial to stick to a consistent schedule during the beginning of the school year. This allows the students to become familiar with the daily and weekly routine of school, especially for any new students, such as kindergarteners or transfer students. I also try to stick to a consistent schedule during the winter months, or those months when the weather is not suitable for doing much of anything outdoors. December, January, February and March are usually fairly cold months here in the Bristol Bay area. Generally, too cold or overcast for the students to want to venture outdoors for a hike or extra P.E. activities. So, I will work the students hard during these months, so when the nice warm Spring weather rolls around in April and May, I can let up on them, and extend their recess time, or lunch break, and do some

activities outside that we couldn't do otherwise. (Pilot Point, Egegik, and a few other schools in our district do not have new school facilities. These schools are the old Bureau of Indian Affairs structures built back in the 1940's and 50's. There are no gym facilities for indoor P.E. and recreational activities in these types of schools.)

(2) Holidays

As in any other school, these students enjoy the holidays and look forward to any celebration of them. This will naturally call for varying the schedule to accommodate preparing for its celebration. Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Easter usually mean more art activities, evening programs, school parties, and rehearsals for school plays. Obviously, this means you may not do as much formal teaching as you normally would.

In these small villages, you will generally find the annual school Christmas program is one of the social highlights of the year. Generally speaking, you will have the major task of putting it together. As I mentioned earlier, you will want to give yourself plenty of lead time to prepare for this; to make sure the students have enough practice and rehearsal time, setting up the stage, making sure you have enough time to order and receive supplies you will need for the program. This particular holiday will be the time in the school year where you will vary your regular schedule the most.

The village people generally expect some kind of school Christmas program, so you simply do the best you can and take

whatever amount of time is necessary to prepare something. As I mentioned before, the most difficult problem you will have in putting together a Christmas program is finding a play that matches up with the number of capable students you have available, who can read and memorize lines. But, it can be done, and the parents and other village community members are usually very grateful for your efforts.

(3) Student Interests

This may also apply to the time of the year, but I'll call these examples student interests. When the conditions are right, I usually vary my schedule to allow the students to go ice skating as part of our P.E. activities. This, of course, is with the local school committee and the parents' consent. I have never let a winter go by without at least one good old-fashioned snowball fight, or snowman or snow fort construction. In Pilot Point School, we had cross country skis for the students. Naturally, we had to take advantage of those few winter days when the conditions were right to use them.

> No lesson plan I've ever written was considered absolute and/or unalterable. If I write a lesson plan for one group of students in reading, for example, and one of those students is absent on the day I planned to do that lesson, many times I have held off on that lesson and reassigned a more independent type of lesson for that group. The reason being, I want to try and keep that group together as much as possible. Now, If I know that student is going to be out of school for several days, then I will go ahead with the lesson as planned. But, a one or two-day delay is not going to make a major difference in their progress.

Sometimes, I may pick up that a student is having a personal problem of some kind. Perhaps he/she is having a

problem at home, or a member of their family is having a problem which is affecting the student, or that student is just a little fatigued or bored with a particular subject area. If I feel it would be in the student's best interest to abandon the particular lesson I had planned, and assign the student something else, I will. That scheduled lesson can wait another day or two.

(4) Teacher Interest (Or Lack of Interest)

Administrators, parents, and/or local school committee members may not like to hear this, but there are times when I may not necessarily be at my best for various reasons. Perhaps I am beginning to come down with a cold or the flu; perhaps I didn't get a good night's sleep, or I may be temporarily feeling down in the dumps about some personal thing in my life. It may not warrant having a substitute teacher fill in for me, but it may be enough of a problem that I may vary my planned schedule until I am feeling up to resuming the normal school routine. I have always taken great pride in trying to stay healthy enough to teach day in and day out. But, even teachers have their ups and downs now and then.

C. Individualized Instruction

In a school setting where you have a span of grades K-8 or K-12, you obviously do very little class instruction. A good portion of each student's daily work is on an individualized basis. You will have small groups, such as in reading, spelling, or social studies. But generally speaking, your students will be progressing along at their own

individual pace and speed even though some students will be in the same level texts. Some examples:

Here in Egegik, I have three students who are in the same basal reading text. One of the students is an excellent reader and doesn't like to read the story orally with the group, as the pace is too slow for her. So, once I've introduced the new vocabulary words for the story, that student returns to her desk to read the story silently and answers the questions by herself. The other two students remain with me and we read the story orally. This allows that one student to at least progress through the lesson at her own pace and not have reading become a dreaded or unpleasant subject for her.

In the area of math, I happen to have an exceptionally bright group of kindergarteners. They are all at different levels. One has even started working in the third grade math book. It is not because I am such a fantastic teacher, but rather this particular student masters most of the skills so quickly she doesn't need a lot of drill and practice for review. It wouldn't be fair to keep any of these three students together as a group in math because they each learn and master the basic skills at different speeds. This certainly requires more effort and time on my part to keep them challenged and moving along, but it is important to keep each of these students interested in math and looking forward to learning new skills.

I have a third grade and a sixth grade student who, in addition to their grade level math books, are also working part-time in a ninth grade algebra book, as they need more challenging and stimulating work than what is in their current grade level texts.

You may find some older students will only ask for your assistance when they are having difficulty. Others will appear to be constantly in need of assistance as they are afraid of trying a task on their own and making a mistake. And, of course, the younger students will need a lot of your direct instruction to move them through their lessons.

D. Small Group Instruction

> Having small groups of students working together and progressing through the same texts will be as close as you come to teaching an entire class. The majority of the time, I group my students together according to ability level, rather than grade level. There is no point giving a fourth grade student fourth grade text books if that student is only functioning at the third grade level, or lower. The opposite holds true as well. There is no point giving a fourth grade student fourth grade text books if that student is functioning at the fifth grade level, or higher.

You will find that your students will vary in strengths and weaknesses in certain subjects. Perhaps your fourth grade student will be capable of working in the fourth grade Reading, Spelling, and English books, but only in a second or third grade math book or third grade Science or Social Studies book; then that is where you should place that student.

> There is one word of caution that I want to mention about the placing of students according to ability level, rather than grade level. In these small schools, you often have several brothers and sisters in the same classroom. It may happen that a younger sibling may be extremely bright and could possibly progress to the same ability level as their older sibling. Even though you could conceivably teach those two in the same level book, I would not recommend it. The older sibling's self-concept and self-esteem could be devastated by this, not only in school, but at home as well. Put that older student in a higher level textbook than the younger student, while providing the older student with supplementary materials and instruction. The sake of convenience on your part just isn't worth

the risk for that student.

E. Informal Assessment

In order to properly place students in the appropriate level books and materials, you must first know the ability levels of your students. The results from previous standardized test scores will give you some clue, but do not rely solely upon those scores.

The most effective means of finding out what your students know and don't know is to do some brief informal assessments of your own with each student. Try to do this during the first week or two of the school year. Some examples:

1) Math - Put together a "test package" of flash cards, one set for each of the four basic operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Then simply call up your students one at a time and see if they can mentally compute these. Obviously, if a student can't successfully compute the basic addition and subtraction facts, there is no need to test that student on the multiplication or division cards. Make a note of these on each student.

Next, make up, or find some ready-made sheets which will test the students' ability to compute problems in the four basic operations. Of course, you will want to make sure these problems progress in a hierarchy, or level of difficulty.

With kindergarten, first, and second grade students, you will also want to test for number readiness. Can they orally count in sequence? Can they identify the numbers 1-20,

1-50,1-100? Can they identify the missing number in a sequence of numbers, etc.?

Continue informally testing your students in the basic skills of math, until you have a pretty good profile of each student's strengths and weaknesses. This will help you better determine which grade level text book in which to place your students.

2) Reading/Reading Readiness - With your kindergarten and first grade students, find out if they can recite the alphabet, if they can identify the letters in order, at random. See if they can associate the correct sound with the letter. When presented a picture, can they give you the first sound that picture begins with? Can they give you the last sound? Find out if they can give you another word that rhymes with that picture. Have some basic sight word cards available, and find out if they can read any of these. This will give you a good understanding of where these younger students are in their reading development.

With the older students, administer the placement test which accompanies most basal reading series, to double check that students are properly placed, and don't need to review, or skip a level. Listen to your students read orally for signs of fluency, their pauses at periods and commas, their inflections. Do some students have particular problems with short vowel sounds, long vowel patterns, contractions, multi-syllable

words, etc? Only then, can you appropriately place students in the correct level reading text.

3) Spelling/Language/Writing Skills - About the easiest way to obtain a quick assessment of students' skills in these areas is to give them a writing assignment. You can then look for spelling error patterns, capitalization and punctuation errors, and their manuscript or cursive writing ability.

> No one will know your students better than you in your school or classroom. No one will be able to determine what is in their best interests as far as their school work is concerned, than you. As I said back in Chapter One, make decisions on your students behalf, and be willing to accept the consequences, either positive or negative, of those decisions. You are the one who will be working with those students day after day, and hopefully, year after year.

F. Supplementary Materials

A wide variety of supplementary materials is a necessity when teaching in a multi-graded school or classroom. In a K-8 setting for example, it is possible to have as many as six reading levels to teach. It is just not effective to attempt to run and manage six basal reading groups or levels at the same time. Depending on your students' abilities, you will find that about three basal reading levels or groups per session will be a manageable number. So, what do I have the other three groups or levels of students do for reading that session?

This is where your supplementary materials come in. There are an infinite supply of good quality, instructive, supplementary reading materials available on the market today. I will tell you what I use as an example, of how to assign your students more independent reading

assignments, so you can devote some quality time and instruction to those students you plan to work directly with, on any particular day.

1) Reading

Barnell/Loft has an excellent series of reading booklets called The Specific Skills Series. Each booklet covers a specific skills area, i.e., Getting the Main Idea, Getting The Facts, Working With Sounds, Drawing Conclusions, etc. The grade levels span from 1-12. In Egegik, all my students work in these booklets. I would recommend you place your students one level below their instructional level, to get them off on a successful note.

Of course, SRA still produces excellent supplementary reading materials. I also use these. Milliken produces a reading comprehension series of disks for the computer, beginning with about third grade reading ability, and progressing through the high school level. This program also keeps track of each student's grade and progress. Come the end of each quarter, I can obtain these results, and record them in my grade book. I have used these in Pilot Point, and continue to use them here in Egegik. And there is nothing wrong with having a student, or two, read a library book during part of their reading period once in awhile.

For the younger students, besides those levels of the Specific Skills Series that I can use, I also have read-along books/cassettes, or books/records that I can use with my K-1 or K-2 students. I also like the DLM (Developmental Learning Materials) Auditory and Visual Perception materials produced by American Guidance Service Co.

So, I have about three or four sources of supplementary materials that I can assign students for independent reading work. This not only allows for better management of the classroom, but as I said, allows me to concentrate, without a lot of interruptions, on two or three groups for direct instruction.

2) Math

Milliken also produces an excellent computer program in math (appropriately called Milliken Math) which I use here in Egegik School. It covers the four basic operations, plus fractions, decimals, percents, integers, and laws of arithmetic. I generally run two or three students through some of these lessons each math period. Like the reading series, this program also keeps track of each student's progress and allows the student to move on to the next higher level when they have successfully mastered the previous level.

Of course, you will need to have a variety of manipulative materials for your younger students to work with to help them visualize certain math concepts.

I also use Allyn and Bacon's Series of Fraction and Decimal booklets to give some of my students a more concentrated exposure in these skill areas. I am a firm believer in students mastering their basic facts in addition and subtraction before introducing larger two and three digit numbers, or carrying or borrowing. So, I have several sets of flashcards available with which to drill my younger students. The same goes for multiplication; have your students memorize those times tables cold before exposing them to more difficult multiplication problems.

3). Language Arts

Milliken also produces computer material in this area -- spelling, grammar, punctuation, alphabetizing.

Addison-Wesley produces a series of language arts and vocabulary worksheets/cassettes called The Target Series, which students can progress through independently. I also like Curriculum Associates materials (although these are not so much for use as independent materials, as they are for direct supplemental instructional use).

> So, basically, make sure you have available to you, a good source and supply of supplementary materials, that students can generally work through on an independent basis, to leave you free to concentrate on a few students and/or groups of students for direct instruction. Don't try to teach new material to every student at once, or have every student in their standard textbook, or basal series at once, as it is too chaotic to expect to do an effective job. Otherwise, you will be doing more crowd control than any kind of meaningful instruction.

G. Student Tutors

This is one concept that I tried not to use--whereby older students would work with, or assist younger students in a particular subject, or skill area. I always took the attitude that teaching the students was my responsibility and my area of expertise, and the student's role was to learn from me.

But here in Egegik, I have found myself allowing more of the older students an opportunity to work with, or assist the younger students in some of their lessons, particularly when that older student has completed their assignment in a particular subject. This has naturally evolved, as you might imagine, where you have such a wide span of ages and grades of students seated in the same classroom. Often times, I am

involved with a group of students on a particular lesson, and I just can't drop what I am doing, or be constantly interrupted to assist another student, or students, who may very well need some assistance. So, they naturally go to an older student for help. What I always find to be satisfying and refreshing, is to see a seventh or eighth grade student, who is diligently working on an assignment, take the time to be interrupted from their train of thought to stop and help, or assist a younger student.

Probably more so, than in any other type of school setting, can you take advantage of older students tutoring and assisting younger students, and having those students enjoying it. I just happen to have one third grade student who wants to be a teacher when she grows up, so she is more than willing to offer to work with any student I might want to receive extra help. Don't hesitate to use this resource.

H. Free Time

One of my most often used phrases in my directives to students is..."You can do something quietly at your desk now." By that I mean, the student has completed an assignment, and there isn't enough time left in the particular period to begin another assignment, so that student can have free time, but it must be something they can do quietly at their desk, or even some other place in the classroom, where they won't disturb the other students, who may be still working on their assignments. Such quiet activities could be:

- Working at the computer, if its unoccupied.
- Reading a library book.
- Looking at, or reading one of the school magazines.
- Listening to a cassette/read-along story.

:: Coloring or drawing.

:: Working with some manipulative materials.

The student is not allowed to just sit there and stare into space. They must do something, as long as it is non-disruptive to the other students. Surprisingly, other students don't seem to become upset when one or more students have free time, and they may not. The other students know, sooner or later, (maybe later that day, tomorrow, or the next day) they too will be able to do something quietly. So don't feel you have to keep your students occupied every single moment of the day. Once you have trained your students not to disrupt the others, they will be able to handle the free time given to them, especially if they realize this time can be lost if they don't abide by your one request...quietly. (And its not an excessive amount.)

I. Keeping Students on Task

"If you waste my time during reading, math, spelling, etc., I will waste your time during recess..."

This one simple rule has worked very well for me over the years. I have had many students learn this rule the hard way, others had only to see other students stay in and work during recess to abide by this rule.

What I try to train my students to do, is when it is math time, I expect to see them working and/or talking about math; when it is reading time, I expect my students to be working and/or talking about their reading assignment, etc. and not about the movie that was on TV last night, or what they plan to do after school. If I look around and see a student off-task, look up again later and see that student off-task, look up again and see that student off-task, that student will not be called to recess, or will not be called to go home for the day. Instead, that particular student, or students will spend their recess time working in whatever subject they were caught not being on-task.

Initially, I may remind a student to get busy, or to settle down and get to work. In most instances this may be enough to keep the

student on-task. But, as I mentioned in Chapter One, I try to keep my verbal directives to a minimum, and I don't like repeating myself to my students. This is another technique of getting the students to monitor themselves, as I mentioned under Scheduling the day/week. You will find, if you initiate this policy in the beginning of the school year, it will work quite effectively for you. You don't need to make a big deal about it, just mention this rule that you have. When a student violates this, calmly tell that student(s) come recess time, that they will have to work in their math, spelling, reading, etc. as they wasted too much of your time. That student(s) may be quite upset with you momentarily, but it will be one of the last times that student(s) will think about not attending to his/her work.

J. Discipline

Disciplinary problems are, I feel, closely tied with keeping students on task or a lack of keeping students on task. Generally speaking, I have never had what I would say was a serious problem with, or concern regarding disciplining of students. If you keep your students on task, they don't have a whole lot of time to get into mischief.

Also, giving your students excessive amounts of free time can also lead to disciplinary problems with some students, as they just may not be able to handle all that free time. I always try to assign my students enough work to keep them on task for most of the period to avoid having a student(s) with forty-five minutes of free time in a sixty minute class period.

One thing our district recently implemented in all its schools, was a student handbook outlining very specifically what is expected of each student attending a school in our district; from attendance,

tardiness, behavior, student rights and responsibilities, etc. Each student is given a copy of this handbook at the beginning of the school year for their review and for their parents' review, so they know up front what will be expected of them.

> I never have, nor never will, believe in the students making up the classroom rules. You are the teacher, you are responsible for their education and their social behavior while attending your school, or classroom. So, you make the rules, and it is up to the students to be willing to accept the consequences of following the rules that you set, and that are outlined in the student handbook.

As I mentioned before, you will find that in such a school setting, you and your students will become more like a "school family," than just a teacher and his/her students.

K. Volunteers

Here in Egegik, I have had the luxury of a few people in the community who have volunteered their time to work with the students on occasion. One man, who has artistic talent, works with the students once a week for about an hour on various art techniques in drawing, shading, and painting. The students have picked up some art skills from this man, that I wasn't able to provide the students, not possessing a strong background or personal interest in art.

A young woman has volunteered to work a few afternoons each week with one of our students who is having difficulties in most subject areas. This student has made noticeable progress since she began giving him the one-to-one intensive attention he needs that I am not always able to provide.

Once in awhile, my local school committee president comes in and teaches an art lesson with the students, as a change of pace for both the students and me.

So, to summarize this chapter on how to teach a wide variety of grades, ability levels, and subjects:

(a) Stick to a regular and consistent daily/weekly schedule to allow your students to monitor themselves in switching over to the next subject or lesson.

(b) Vary your schedule, as you feel is necessary, to accommodate the special occasions and holidays, student interests, and your interests.

(c) Most of the students will be taught, and will progress on an individualized basis, at their own pace or speed.

(d) Group your students according to their ability level, rather than according to their grade level.

(e) Find out each student's strengths and weaknesses before placing them in their textbooks. This can be easily done with quick informal assessments on your part.

(f) Make sure you have available in your school or classroom, a wide variety of supplementary materials. This will allow you

to have some of your students working independently on instructional assignments, so you can devote quality, and direct instruction time to the rest of your students.

(g) Using older students as tutors and helpers with some of your younger and less capable students, is a natural occurrence in this type of school setting. Don't hesitate to use it.

(h) Make allowances for students to have free time to pursue other interests, as long as they don't disrupt the rest of the class.

(i) Train your students to monitor themselves, to keep on task, with the understanding that if they waste your valuable teaching time, you will waste their valuable recess time.

(j) Keeping students on task will do more for you than any other technique, in keeping discipline problems at a minimum. It is important that you make the class rules, as only you should be the one to enforce them. Having a student handbook available for all students is also a positive approach in outlining rules and expectations for which your students will be held accountable.

(k) Welcome and encourage those individuals in your community who wish to volunteer their time, services, and expertise to work with the students, that you and your local school committee

feel would be of benefit to the students, particularly if it is in an area you are not as qualified to teach.

CHAPTER FOUR

OTHER ITEMS OF CONCERN AND IMPORTANCE

I want to mention the following topics of concern that you, as a teacher in rural Alaska, might also want to be aware of, that I couldn't place in the other chapters.

A. Personal Items to Bring With You

It was brought to my attention that this is one area that a lot of first-time teachers to rural Alaska have questions and concerns about -- that they just didn't know, or were not told what kinds of personal items to bring with them when they received their first teaching assignment.

So, let me try to give you a basic needs list that you might want to consider and keep in mind.

(1) Clothing

The type of winter clothing you will need will vary depending upon which part of the state you will be living and working in. For example, in Southeast Alaska, you will want to invest in good quality rain gear as this section of the state receives about eighty (80) or more inches of rain per year. The winter temperatures usually do not drop below zero for any long periods of time.

In other parts of the state, good quality goose-down clothing (coats, snowpants, gloves, face protectors, etc.) are necessary. Again, the winter temperature extremes (and the summer temperature extremes as well) vary within the state, so you will need to ask the

District you are considering working for, what types of winter clothing you will need.

Basically, dressing in layers is the most recommended method as you can add to, or shed the clothing as the conditions dictate. Thermal underwear is good if you are going to be outdoors for long periods of time, but not very practical for itinerant teachers who may be comfortable wearing them while traveling to their schools, but once inside the school, will perspire with them on. So, dress in layers, with goose down coats, wool, flannel, and/or corduroy type of material. In some sections of the state, you will need the heavier insulated down coats, while in other parts of the state a lighter quality down coat will suffice. Be sure to ask about the weather conditions and temperature extremes where you will be living and working.

(2) Sleeping Bag

You will need this as you may have to travel for overnight meetings, workshops, inservice meetings, or with some of your students on school trips, and you may have to sleep in the school gym or school building. Also, you may have unexpected guests or visitors that may need this.

(3) Footwear

Again, this will vary according to the section of the state you will be living and working. Felt-lined boots (where the lining can be taken out of the boot to be dried if it becomes damp) are very popular for outdoor use. In some sections of the state, where the winter temperatures get down to -40° or so, the Army surplus bunny boots (with air pumped into them) are used.

(4) A good quality knife and sharpener.

(5) A small meat saw.

(6) Bedding

This is not provided by the District for district housing, nor for village housing. You will need to be sure to provide this (i.e., sheets, blankets, pillowcases, spreads, and in some instances, even pillows.)

(7) Personal toiletry articles.

(8) Cooking and Kitchen Utensils

These you may have to supply yourself, especially if you have to rent village housing. Sometimes, even District housing may not have everything you need. (Be sure to ask about this, and perhaps even have these items all packed and ready to ship up in case you should need them.)

(9) Medication

If you are taking prescribed medication, be sure to bring along enough to last for several months at a time. Also, stock up on all the basics of cough medicines, aspirins, etc. so you will have them readily available. (Some villages may not have a store, or may not have what you prefer.)

B. Non-teaching Spouses

If you secure a teaching position in rural Alaska and your spouse is a non-teacher or does not secure a teaching position, you may want to take the time to talk this situation over with one another before making the final decision to come up to your site.

You, as the teacher, will have more than enough to keep you busy and your time occupied. You will want to be careful and concerned that your spouse will also have enough to do during the day to keep him/her busy and fulfilled. Some of the rural villages are more isolated than others. Some villages have more of a community spirit to them. That is, they may have a regular schedule of events and activities planned for the community residents - evening activities at the school, adult sports activities, church activities, monthly potlucks, movies, etc. Other villages may not have such an active group or social gatherings. So, it is important you consider your spouse's concerns and well being when accepting a teaching position in rural Alaska.

I've known many teachers who have come and gone because their spouses did not like the setting, or lacked enough activities and challenges to keep them active and satisfied. Other teachers I have known have come up to teach alone, leaving their spouses and/or families behind for a period of time just to be on the safe side, then brought them up later in the school year, or the next school year. With other teachers, this hasn't been a problem or major concern.

C. Cabin Fever

It took me several years before I experienced what is commonly referred to as "cabin fever." This "depressed", "burnt out," "I don't give a damn anymore," "this is definitely my last year teaching out here," "I can't wait to get back to civilization" feeling usually seeps in around mid-February during the dark days of winter. I suppose it is worse if you are single or alone, but it could happen to married couples as well.

At times, this feeling can last for days at a time, but eventually passes. Some suggestions on how to get through this depressing period of time if it should ever infect you:

(1) Telephone someone you are close to; a girlfriend, boyfriend, spouse, parent, children, grandparent, other school employee, and just talk, talk, talk...about anything and everything.

(2) Cook up a storm (if you are a decent cook) and pig out or bring the food around to community members if you don't want to consume all the food yourself.

(3) Go visiting around the community.

(4) Invite some friends over for an evening of company, card games, etc.

(5) Take a more active interest in your hobbies or other personal interests, or attempt a new hobby.

(6) Try exercising or do more of it if you already exercise regularly.

(7) If you can't shake the feeling, take some personal leave time and just relax. If you are not too isolated, get out of the village for a few days.

D. Non-District Personnel Staying at the School

Although this is not as common as it once was, there are times when someone (or several) comes into the village to perform some work or service for the village, or the state, and does not have a place to stay. The school usually ends up taking in such people, even though they are not connected with the school district in any way. This can be somewhat

irritating to the teacher at times, especially if they arrive unannounced. But, as I said, this doesn't occur as often as in the the past.

However, there may still be some small, relatively isolated villages that just do not have any community facilities that can accommodate itinerant workers. Even though I am not the best cook around, I try to put myself in that individual's place -- if I were a stranger coming into a small community for a couple of days of work, I would be grateful to someone taking the time to allow me a place to stay and providing a cooked meal and a comfortable place to sleep.

E. Groceries

You might want to ship up or bring along with you a small box of basic food stuffs to get you by the first day or two (or longer if you find out that the village doesn't have a store, or the store is across or down the river, and you may not be able to get to it right away.) Most villages will have a store of some kind that you can get your basic supplies.

However, for your long-term needs, you will want to consider ordering your food out of the larger cities. You can have these mailed out to you via parcel post. It is usually less expensive in the long run, especially if you order case lots of items. But, you can also order half-case lots or even individual items if you wish. Some villages in our District can get their supplies shipped up from Seattle on barges that come into their community on a regularly scheduled basis. This method is very cost effective, but you may have to order full case lots. However, you can combine your order with another member of the community and share those items that you don't wish to have full cases of. You

will want to be sure to check with your employer for this information, so you can plan ahead a bit.

CHAPTER FIVE

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS TO ASK PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYING SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN RURAL ALASKA

One thing you should do when interviewing with a rural school district is to ask as many questions concerning the District, the position you are applying for, the village you may be living and working in, and the village school set up.

Don't be afraid or hesitant to ask any types of questions or concerns that you may have, no matter how silly they may appear to you or to your prospective employer. Ask that the District's representatives be thorough, honest and if necessary, blunt and to the point to your questions. The more you know about your possible teaching assignment, the better prepared you will be when you get there -- or it may turn out that this assignment or position might not be suitable for you -- and you could decline the offer and possibly save yourself and the District any unnecessary problems during the coming school year.

Besides some of the more standard and basic questions you will ask (which I won't list here), you might want to keep some of the following in mind:

1) The District in General:

a) What is the size of the school district? (in miles)

b) How many villages comprise the District?

c) Are all the villages in the District isolated from each other or can a person travel overland, by water, or connecting road to neighboring villages without any major difficulties?

d) What is the student population of the entire District?

e) What is the student population of the village school you may be living and working in?

f) How many teachers/administrators are in the District?

g) How many teachers/administrators are in the village school where you may be living and working in?

2) Weather Conditions

a) What is the weather like where you may be living and working? (i.e., average winter temperatures, possible extreme temperatures, snow-fall; how much, rain, wind).

3) Air Travel Within the District

a) Can you get to your village by large commercial jet, or is it accessible only by smaller commercial aircraft?

b) Is the air travel in the area relatively safe, or do the frequent storms and inclimate weather conditions make air travel in this part of the state a bit more risky than in other areas?

(The reason I put these two questions in here is because there may be some prospective teachers out there that simply may not feel comfortable flying in small aircraft

and/or flying in windy, stormy conditions - which may occur on occasion. There are many other rural villages in the state which are accessible by the larger commercial jets. This may be more suitable for you.)

4) Is there a store in the village where you can get basic supplies? (Don't assume that there is.)

5) Is there a post office in the village?
(The same with this question)

6) Where can you order bulk groceries and supplies from? (What is the closest major city or town you could order these from - Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, etc. Ask for the names and addresses of some of these grocery stores.)

7) Is there a regular barge line service to the village, in order to get supplies?

8) Ask if you can ship/mail boxes to the village school prior to your arrival?

9) Ask for the phone number of the village post office, when you secure a teaching position, so you can call ahead and let the postmaster know that you may be mailing boxes up ahead of you, and if he/she wouldn't mind holding them for you?

10) Does the District provide teacher housing, or do you have to secure your own housing in the village?

In regards to village housing, don't expect to rent the type of home you will be leaving behind. Generally speaking, the homes in the rural areas of the state are small, yet functional. The inside of the homes receive more attention and care than the outside. Availability of village housing for teachers varies from village to village, but you should expect to rent a home that is clean, warm, and dry.

11) Ask about the village and its residents, you are considering teaching in. Ask about the ethnic make-up of the residents.

12) Is the village a traditional native village with strong ties to their cultural ways? (i.e., native language dominant, or still somewhat active; subsistence way of life, cash economy, or a mixture of the two?)

13) Who are the most influential and/or powerful people in the village?

14) Ask about the students in the village school you are considering teaching. Chances are the individual interviewing you will have some idea of the students' ages, grade spans, personalities, and ability levels.

15) Ask about the salary schedule and other benefits that the District provides the staff.

CHAPTER SIX

ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES TO TEACHING IN A ONE TEACHER SCHOOL

As you know, every teaching situation has its advantages and disadvantages. A one teacher school can be an ideal school setting for the right type of teacher. I have listed some of each, according to how I view them.

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
1. More freedom to make choices/ decisions regarding the school routine.	1. No other staff, or faculty members to rely on for assistance.
2. No direct daily supervision from administration. (Sorry guys!!??)	2. Having to teach all grade levels, and all subject areas.
3. Teacher becomes very close to most students/parents.	3. Perhaps a higher level of stress placed upon self to succeed.
4. You do not have to be concerned about matching of faculty staff, (i.e. personalities, strengths, weaknesses, etc).	4. Have to take all of the responsibility for those students who do not make satisfactory progress.
5. You do not have to be concerned about staff conflicts, and/or one teacher not pulling their weight.	5. You cannot afford to be sick, or take too many personal leave days, as you may be the only certified teacher in the village. (You can use non-certified subs.)
6. You can take all, or most of the credit and self-satisfaction for students' progress.	6. You are essentially on call 24 hours per day/7 days per week, for nine months of the year.
7. Living in the school apartment. (Depending on your point of view.)	

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
8. Seeing a child develop over the years, and knowing you played a big part in that development.	7. Living in the school apartment. (Depending on your point of view.)
9. Appreciation of your efforts/ commitment by the community.	8. You must perform all duties of the school routine (i.e., administrative, teacher, community relations).
	10. Possible early teacher burnout. (i.e. developing feelings of inadequacy, not worth all your time and effort.)
	11. Difficulty accepting the fact that you are not 100% competent in all aspects of the curriculum.

Please don't be alarmed that I have listed more disadvantages than advantages. You have to weigh them one against the other. I personally believe a small rural one teacher school setting is not for every teacher, any more than teaching in a large school system is not for every teacher.

I hope after reading this booklet, you have come away with a clearer picture of what it is like (or what it could be like) teaching and living in this type of setting.

For those of you considering teaching in Rural Alaska, I hope this has given you some useful information to help you make your final decision.

Good luck in your search for a teaching position.

For those of you wishing to actively pursue teaching opportunities in Alaska, I recommend you contact the Alaska Teacher Placement office (address below). They will provide you with a list of teaching positions available and school districts hiring at any particular time.

Alaska Teacher Placement
University of Alaska-Fairbanks
Fairbanks, Alaska 99775
(907) 474-6644